

THE STORIES: VESNA



First name: **VESNA**

Last name: **DOŠEN**

Age: **54**

Country of origin: **BOSNIA**

Living in **Slovenia** since: **1987**

SHORT SUMMARY

When Vesna was 24, she left Ključ, her home town to discover Croatia and later Slovenia. One could say that at the very beginning she was an economic migrant, but no! In those days Bosnia, Croatia and Slovenia were three out of six Yugoslav republics and constituent parts of the same country. In 1992 a war broke out in Bosnia and war atrocities began for her family. Vesna was in Slovenia in those days having a good job in a printing house in Ljubljana but fearing for the life of her relatives. Finally they escaped to Croatia. Vesna's employer went bankrupt, she was jobless. She decided to set up her own company offering cleaning services to different clients, she employed an accountant and continued working hard. There were many formalities to overcome. But she managed. Since then, she's been working for Slovenian Third Age University and other clients. At the age of 52 she met Ivan, her partner and she moved with him in his family house, 60 km from Ljubljana where she travels each day.

"That's life," she says, speaking about her life so far, knowing that there are things that cannot be changed. On the contrary, what she could change she did change.

Vesna is a refugee role model since despite all the hardships she has developed a positive and engaging attitude towards life, evaluating possibilities, making things happen. She has close ties with her family, but not Bosnia and her native town now destroyed and deserted.

"Learning the language of the host country is a must", she says.

Being flexible, adapting with joy and curiosity is an advantage.

HOME IS WHERE MY MOTHER IS, HOME IS WHERE IVAN IS

VESNA'S STORY

In 1987 Vesna was 24 when with her father's help she left Ključ, her home town, and her family to go away and see new places and meet new people. Curious and enterprising, she first went to the neighbouring Croatia, stayed there some time, but Slovenia was for her the country to go. In 1987 she started working in a printing house. It was a good job. She liked it. This was before the war in Bosnia broke out.

Vesna says that she has never been truly fond of the Bosnian landscape. She spent her childhood and youth in Ključ, a small locality with only 300 catholic Croats like herself. The others were Muslims or Serbs, though when she was a child such attributes were not important. She was somehow not attracted by the region around Ključ. In her eyes, Slovenia has always been the most beautiful country in the world, so green, so hilly and mountainous.

Vesna arrived in Ljubljana, settled down in Fužine, then Rudnik, then

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Vižmarje, different areas of the city. Then she moved to Medvode a small locality near Ljubljana. Moving from one place to another has never been a problem for her curious mind and engaging soul, rather an opportunity. But in 1992, when the war broke out in Bosnia, her living in Ljubljana was no more a matter of choice. She lived there out of necessity, at her sister's place. *"I will be thankful till the end"*. She helped me so much.

Vesna worked for good companies and associations, had a good job till her employer went bankrupt and she became jobless. She set up her own company, employed an accountant. Her company has been offering cleaning services to the Slovenian Third Age University and other clients. At the age of 52 she met Ivan. Now, home is where Ivan is. Talking to Vesna one easily recalls the title of a popular song *"I owe thanks to my life, for having given me so much"*.

CONFLICT

In 1992 when the war broke out in Bosnia, Vesna was in Slovenia, fearing for her relatives, friends and neighbours' life with all the war atrocities going on in Bosnia. Her family was in Ključ. People left one after another. Some didn't. So Serbs came and some day they captured her father and cousin. Through the kitchen window her mother saw how they were leading him away noticing that each single hair on his head was sweating. They killed him in a cruel way and the family was not even allowed to bury him. No funeral. He died like a dog. Vesna says: "One couldn't do anything about it. It happened. Period." Though emotional, she does not deal with what cannot be changed. She is rather oriented towards the present and the future. This has become her defence mechanism.

Atrocities would not stop. Some day her relatives went to the barn, when they

opened the door and found Vesna's father dead, hanging from a beam. They never knew what happened, and why he had hung himself or somebody else had hung him.

ESCAPE

So, they decided to go away. Evacuated, they travelled by bus to Croatia carrying a small plastic bag in which were to be stored all their belongings. Vesna's mother had managed to see in her dress some precious jewellery. In Croatia they moved from one place to another before they finally settled down in Varaždin. Today her mother's home there is one of Vesna's two emotional homes. Bosnia with all sad stories had been left behind. There is nobody there anymore. They are all displaced, scattered somewhere in the world or dead, now.

BELONGING

Vesna maintains close and continuous contact with her family. Family ties matter for her. Vesna says "Home is where my mother is - Varaždin in Croatia and where Ivan is - in Slovenia. When Vesna's last employer went bankrupt, she, like many others, was jobless and had to cope with the situation. She decided she would set up her own company offering cleaning and other services. There were many formalities to accomplish and overcome, but she managed. She had to employ an accountant. Ever since Vesna has been working for Slovenian Third Age University and some other clients. She is a good worker, diligent and joyful, appreciated by the students and the staff. She is rarely ill or rather she goes on working despite being ill. She says she misses the staff and students,

Maintaining family ties is essential.

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her work so much, lying in bed. One might say she is not talkative, though she has a good command of Slovenian. “If you come to another country, you have to speak the same language, you simply have to learn it. This is a must”. There are Bosnians who do not speak Slovene, because their language is widely understood, but Vesna thinks that one has to learn the language of the country. Absolutely! “She has difficulties understanding different dialects. But who hasn’t?

Vesna says she had not been lucky “*in love*”, she simply had not met the right person, but recently she has met Ivan and obviously she is happy about this new situation. “*It feels good sharing joy with somebody*”. Ivan is Slovene with “*Slovenian mentality*” but Vesna likes him to be different. She has always appreciated diversity. Now, they both live in his 200 year old family house. Vesna considers herself to be a peasant, a country girl. She learned at an early age how to milk cows, make cheese, butter, how to grow vegetables, cultivate soil. Ivan’s house has become Vesna’s home. There is silence around her village Višnje, situated in a beautiful part of Slovenia, 60 km from Ljubljana. Each day she travels to Ljubljana... she does not mind! One can feel she has roots now, in Slovenia, in Ivan’s life, in Ivan’s house, their home.

Vesna maintains ties with her family her sister and her four grown up nephews. One day she took Ivan to Bosnia to show him where she comes from. But they found the place destroyed, deserted, many people having left the town or died of natural death.

**Learning
the language of
the host society
is a must.**

MILESTONES AND STRATEGIES SUPPORTING VESNA’S INCLUSION

She came to Slovenia before the war started, wanting to come. She had a good job in a printing house. She became jobless and created her own company. She helped her family leave war atrocities behind and come to Croatia. She has a curious mind and is exclusively focused on the present and future. “*What cannot be changed should not be dealt with!*” “*Finding a “sister soul”, a partner, means being happy. Being flexible, adapting with joy and curiosity is an advantage. One has to find the right, suitable natural environment. Maintaining family ties is essential. Learning the language of the host society is a must.*”